

Daily we face the expectations of others and need to make choices about which expectations to fulfill. From childhood into adulthood, everyone who maintains social connections must deal with human expectations. Further, as creatures of God our Creator (that is, the God described in the Bible), every human will make choices about God's expectations, whether to fulfill or ignore them, or more commonly, some combination of the two responses. I would like to propose a checklist of biblical criterion for making wise and good choices about the expectations of God and people. The list is loosely arranged in order of higher priorities to lower priorities, and the higher ones should have greater influence in deciding whether to accept or refuse an expectation.

### **Identifying Types of Expectations**

First I should mention the kinds of expectations we face, ordered from the universal/general to the individual.

#### **1. WRITTEN CODES:**

- a. *God's written code of expectations:* biblical laws or commands, Biblical teaching about the content of faith and the knowledge of God.
- b. *Human written codes of expectations:* some of these are by birth into a particular society such as laws of society, some are chosen such as accepting a job with its description and employee work standards & rules, or choosing to be a member of an organization, and agreeing to submit to standards of organizational membership.

#### **2. VERBAL OR VISIBLE CODES**

- a. *Cultural and family expectations:* Some expectations are based upon *social standards* into which a person is born and raised and which his parents, relatives, teachers and influential others educate him, but are not generally written codes. Standard of politeness expected by parents upon their children come in part from the large social expectations of the general public: washing hands regularly, shaking hands or bowing as a form of greeting, socially acceptable or taboo topics for casual conversation, forms of thankfulness.
- b. *Self-chosen social expectations:* Some expectations are *willingly adopted from a culture group* of one's choosing, such as a teenage girl identifying with the slender high fashion models through beauty magazines, TV shows, the internet or advertising photos. An expectation of this kind might express itself in trying to change oneself to image the body weight or hair or clothing style that is currently "expected" in the fashion world. Again these are generally not codified in writing, but observed in media and verbalized among like-minded friends.
- c. *Standing, Recurring, Remembered Expectations:* Other expectations are perhaps spoken in the past numerous times (and perhaps the subject of many disagreements or fights) and are thus *assumed, continuous expectations or duties*, such as my wife asking me to engage in conversation with her on a daily basis, but not actually verbally requested every day. A similar type of expectation would be a mother repeatedly

## Biblical Criterion for Facing Other's Expectations

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reminding her child to clean his room, and thus hopes that her son's growing maturity will accept the responsibility without being asked as often.

- d. Some are *directly spoken or written*, as in a friend telephoning to ask me to drive him to the airport, an email from a church member asking if I have time to counsel her friend, or a child waking me up at night to asking for chocolate milk.

### **Biblical Criterion for Submitting to Expectations upon you**

#### 1. YOUR STATIC CONDITIONS

- a. God's commands: love God and love your neighbor as yourself (in order of priority to family, church leaders, Christians, poor & helpless, strangers, non-Christians), stewardship of creation, the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations, avoid participating in or supporting evil people, plans or purposes directly.
- b. Your promises: your vows to God in baptism, marriage, parental vows at infant baptism, church membership vows, pledges of allegiance, citizenship, contractual agreements, job contracts

#### 2. YOUR FLUCTUATING CONDITIONS

- a. The permission of relevant authorities responsible for your life or work
- b. Your gifts and abilities: will this help you move towards your most effective usefulness in God's work?
- c. Your financial needs
- d. Your need for weekly Sabbath rest and daily sleep
- e. Your surplus time not required for static promises above: repent of your own laziness, use your surplus to give to one lacking (2 Cor 8:13-15)
- f. Your spiritual readiness to offer the needed help (Gal 6:1; 2 Tim 2:24-26; 1 Thess 5:14), act in faith
- g. Your ability to say "No" without fear of criticism (not a man-pleaser trying to "save the world", nor a man-ignorant unmoved by real needs)
- h. Your resources for delegation and training others to meet this expectation

#### 3. THE FLUCTUATING CONDITIONS OF THE ONE EXPECTING YOUR HELP

- a. Does this person have a real emergency with quick solutions or is a long-term, slow solution needed?
- b. Is this person lazy, failing to do what could be done with his/her own resources?
- c. Is this person manipulative, placing unrealistic expectations on you for his/her own advantage and your loss?